



**To:** Denver City Council, Jolon Clark President  
**From:** Kara Hahn, Principal Planner, Community Planning & Development (CPD)  
**Date:** February 7, 2019  
**RE:** Landmark Designation for the Armour & Company Administration Building, 5001 Packing House Road

**Staff Recommendation:**

Based on ordinance designation criteria and on the findings of the Landmark Preservation Commission (LPC) that the application meets the criteria for designation of a structure, staff recommends approval of the application.

**Request to Designate a Structure:**

**Application:** #2018L-007  
**Address:** 5001 Packing House Road  
**Zoning:** I-MX-5, UO-2  
**Council:** District 9, Albus Brooks  
**Blueprint Denver:** Area of Change  
**Owner:** City and County of Denver, National Western Center  
**Applicant(s):** City and County of Denver, National Western Center

**Case Summary:**

The National Western Center submitted a Landmark Designation application for the Armour & Company Administration Building, 5001 Packing House Road, to CPD. Staff performed an investigation and found the application to be complete and to meet Denver Landmark designation criteria. As such, staff set the public hearing at the Landmark Preservation Commission for December 18, 2018. At the public hearing, the LPC voted (8-0) to recommend approval and forward to City Council the landmark designation, based on History Criteria 1a and 1c, Architecture Criterion 2a, and Geography Criteria 3b and 3c, citing as findings of fact for the application form, public testimony, and the staff report.

On January 15, 2019, the Land Use, Transportation, and Infrastructure Committee forwarded the case to the full City Council. At first reading, Denver City Council ordered the bill published and the public hearing is set for February 11, 2019.

**Designation Criteria and Evaluation, Chapter 30, Denver Revised Municipal Code:**

To meet landmark designation criteria, in accordance with Chapter 30-4, Denver Revised Municipal Code, a structure must meet the following criteria:

1. Meet one designation criteria in two or more of the following categories:
  - History
  - Architecture
  - Geography
2. Maintain its physical and historical integrity
3. LPC consider how structure relates to context or theme

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**Criteria Evaluation:**

Landmark staff found that the structure application meets History Criteria 1a and 1c, Architecture Criterion 2a, and Geography Criteria 3b and 3c.

**1. Historical Significance**

**To have historical significance, the structure or district shall be thirty (30) or more years old or have extraordinary importance to the historical development of Denver, and shall:**

*a) Have direct association with the historical development of the city, state, or nation;*

The Armour & Company Administration Building is directly associated with the economic development in Denver and Colorado, and specifically with the growth and decline of meat processing facilities at the Denver Union Stock Yards (DUSY). The building represents the significant investment and development of local and national meatpacking companies and slaughter houses that once dominated the stockyards. The building is the last extant building of the Armour & Company meatpacking plant on this location. Armour and the other major meatpackers boosted Denver up to the level of other meatpacking centers such as Omaha, Kansas City, St. Joseph, and Sioux City, and created the nation's largest sheep market and the primary hog processing and distributing facility west of the Mississippi at the DUSY.

Armour's investment in the Denver market was matched by Swift and Cudahy, which also operated large meat packing facilities at the yards, in addition to numerous smaller companies. Meatpackers controlled the stockyards, ranches, cattle, and transportation of meat products in Denver and similar markets for decades and wielded enormous influence on Denver and Colorado's economic vitality in this area of the city. The Armour Administration Building is one of the last remaining buildings that represents this important component of Denver's history.

*c) Have direct and substantial association with a person or group of persons who had influence on society;*

The property is directly associated with the skilled and semi-skilled laborers who worked at the meatpacking plant, many of whom lived nearby in the Elyria, Swansea, and Globeville neighborhoods. This building housed the administration headquarters, where the white-collar employees worked and controlled the day-to-day activities of the plant. The majority of the blue-collar Armour employees were immigrants from Russian, Slavic, and other Eastern European countries, in addition to numerous other ethnic groups and native-born citizens. While it is well-known that slaughter house employees worked long hours for menial pay, and in generally appalling conditions, meatpacking still provided the greatest number of stable jobs for nearby residents until the 1960s, when the large meatpacking plants on Packing House Drive closed. As such, the Armour meatpacking plant had a profound impact on scores of employees who supported their families by working at the plant and is one of the few remaining buildings that reflect that employment center for the nearby residents.

The property is also significant for its association with the Gebhard family and the Colorado Packing and Provision Company (CPPC). Henry Gebhard established the CPPC at this location in 1890 and passed the responsibilities of the business to his son Charles Gebhard, who ran the plant as manager until his untimely death at the age of 43 in 1919. Henry Gebhard helped establish the DUSY in 1881 and served

on the executive board of the Western Stock Show Association (WSSA), and helped produce the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) by serving on numerous committees from 1906 until his death in 1922. He was elected Vice President of the WSSA board from 1913 to 1922, serving under President Elias Ammons. After Armour & Company purchased the CPPC, the Gebhards continued to run the plant as local partners, and the name CPPC was displayed prominently over the entrance to the Armour Office Building when it was constructed in 1917.

## **2. Architectural Significance**

**To have architectural importance, the structure or district shall have design quality and integrity, and shall:**

*a) Embody distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or type;*

The 1917 Armour Office Building is one of Denver's few intact examples of Neo-Classical style architecture outside of downtown Denver. The Neo-Classical style is evident in the Armour Office Building's cleanly delineated corbelled cornices, simple geometric designs on the brick walls, and regular, symmetrical form and fenestration. Simplified and elegant, these elements can be interpreted as an expression of the masculine aesthetic that characterized the American West and the ranching culture at the DUSY.

## **3. Geographic Significance**

**To have geographic importance, the structure or district shall have design quality and integrity, and shall:**

*b) Promote understanding and appreciation of the urban environment by means of distinctive physical characteristics or rarity;*

The Armour Office Building is a unique and distinctive remnant of the meatpacking history at the DUSY and one of the few buildings left that can educate people about the former prominence of meatpacking and slaughter houses in this part of Denver. All but a few buildings that were part of the Swift and Armour plants were eventually demolished to make way for parking lots. The office building is a distinctive structure that can help people understand the scale and significance of the stockyards and meatpacking plants to Denver and Colorado's agricultural economy.

*c) Make a special contribution to Denver's distinctive character.*

The Armour Office Building is representative of the contribution that the meatpacking industry had to Denver's character as a major hub of the livestock industry and host to the annual National Western Stock Show. This property is directly associated with the CPPC's and Armour's development of the meatpacking industry at the DUSY, which supported ranching and livestock industries in Colorado and other nearby states that shipped animals to Denver for processing. In its historic location, the Armour Office Building is a distinctive landmark within the stockyards, which has collectively defined the character of Denver as a major livestock hub since the early 20th century.



Armour Administration Building, front and side elevations, ca 1917



Armour Administration Building, front and side elevations, 2018

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**Integrity:**

Chapter 30, DRMC requires that a landmark designated property maintain its historic and physical integrity, defined as “the ability of a structure or district convey its historic and architectural significance...recognized as belonging to its particular time and place in Denver’s history.” The seven qualities that define integrity are location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

The existing property retains a high degree of integrity, within minimal changes. While the property retains its integrity of location, there have been extensive changes to the surrounding area. The loss of the rest of the meat packing plant facilities on the larger parcel has had a negative impact on the integrity of the historic setting and feeling of the former site. On the front façade a window was changed to a door, but the overall fenestration pattern was retained and does not significantly impact the integrity of design, workmanship, and material. As a rare survivor of the former massive complex of slaughter houses that dominated the western edge of the stockyards, the Armour Property is able to convey significance as a former administrative office building that was once associated with the meatpacking history of this part of Denver.

**Relate to a Historic Context/Theme and Period of Significance:**

The Armour Office Building is associated with the development of meatpacking in Denver and the growth of ranching and the livestock industries in Colorado and other nearby states that shipped animals to Denver for processing. The period of significance for the Armour Property begins in 1917, the year the office building was constructed, until 1967, when the Armour Company built new offices and a plant at 4800 Washington Street and began leasing the office building at the stockyards to other organizations.

**Relationship to the Comprehensive Plan (2000), Blueprint Denver (2002), National Western Center Master Plan (2015), and Elyria and Swansea Neighborhoods Plan (2015)**

The comprehensive plan envisioned Denver in 2020 as vibrant, with well-preserved and appropriately used structures representing every era of the city’s history. It included strategies (1-C) that “Preserve Denver’s architectural and design legacies while allowing new to evolve.” This property is located in an Area of Change in Blueprint Denver. However, within an Area of Change, the strategies in Blueprint Denver address compatibility between existing and new development as well as reuse of older buildings and historic preservation.

Both the National Western Center Master Plan and the Elyria and Swansea Neighborhoods Plan support the designation of structures. The National Western Center Master Plan specifically calls out the Armour Administration Building as eligible for designation. And, the Elyria and Swansea Neighborhoods Plan recommends showcasing the unique history of the neighborhoods through “additional historic designations throughout the neighborhoods, especially with respect to the National Western Center.”

**Boundary:**

The designation application proposes to designate the legal description below:

A parcel of land lying in the southwest quarter of Section 14, Township 3 south, Range 68 west of the 6th P.M., City and County of Denver, State of Colorado described as follows;

Commencing at the Center Quarter Corner of said section 14, whence the South Quarter Corner of said section 14 lies S 00° 20' 34" W 2657.09 feet, with all bearings herein being relative thereto, thence S 25° 13' 08" W 1909.86 feet to the Point of Beginning.

Thence S 34° 40' W 117.5 feet, along a line 20 feet from and parallel with the rear or northwesterly side of the Armour Admin building;

Thence S 55° 20' E 125.5 feet, along a line 8 feet from and parallel with the southwesterly side of the Armour Admin building;

Thence N 34° 40' E 117.5 feet, along a line 50 feet from and parallel with the front or southeasterly side of the Armour Admin building;

Thence N 55° 20' W 125.5 feet, along a line 20 feet from and parallel with the northeasterly side of the Armour Admin building, to the Point of Beginning;

Containing 14,746 square feet or 0.3385 acres.

**Public Review Process:**

Community Planning & Development has met all posting and notification requirements delineated in Chapter 12 (Article III, Section 12-96) and Chapter 30 of the DRMC.

**Notifications:**

- Owner notification letters regarding the LPC public hearing
- City Council, Planning Board, and Building Inspection email notifications
- Registered Neighborhood Organization and courtesy email notifications
  - Elyria Swansea/Globeville Business Association
  - UCAN
  - Cross Community Coalition
  - Elyria and Swansea Neighborhood Association
  - Inter-Neighborhood Cooperation (INC)
  - Denver Neighborhood Association, Inc.
  - Historic Denver, Inc
  - Colorado Preservation, Inc
  - National Trust for Historic Preservation
  - State of Colorado Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation
- Posted signage for Landmark Preservation Commission public hearing

**Public Comments:**

As of the date of this staff report, CPD has received no public comment regarding the application.

**Attachments Provided by CPD:**

- Designation Application
- Map of landmark boundary
- Landmark Preservation Commission meeting record